

JAPAN CHRISTIAN ACTIVITY NEWS

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NCC ANNUAL MEETING -- A resignation, elections, and a Movement

After seven years as General Secretary of the post-war NCC, Rev. Akira Ebisawa has resigned. Even before the war, Rev. Ebisawa was a leader in the NCC and became the General Secretary in 1932. When the Nihon Kirisuto Kyodan was formed in 1939, however, the NCC and all other Protestant Christian organizations in Japan (except the Japan Episcopal Church) became a part of this organization. During the war years, therefore, there was no NCC as such, but in May 1948 the present NCC was formed; and Rev. Ebisawa was elected as General Secretary.

Starting with himself as the only secretary and a borrowed desk in a corner of a Kyodan office as the only center of operations, Rev. Ebisawa has built the post-war NCC into the present organization with thirteen secretaries, twenty-two office workers and a total budget of ¥33,504,000 (\$93,000).

Since Rev. Ebisawa was a minister in the Kyodan, it is fitting that the new General Secretary, Rev. Kiyoshi Hirai, be a Lutheran. Rev. Hirai was the former moderator of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. One of the vice-chairmen, Rev. Yukichi Makise, is also a member of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The other Vice-chairman, Bishop Hinsuke Yashiro, is the presiding bishop of the Japan Episcopal Church (Seikokai).

The 8th Annual Meeting was held in the new AVACO building. Here, 90 of the 103 appointed delegates, and 103 of the 114 appointed associate delegates gathered from all over Japan. They elected former Moderator of the Kyodan, Michio Kozaki to be the chairman of the meeting.

The first day, March 22, was given to hearing reports and projected plans of The Centenary Movement. This past year has seen three evangelistic campaigns led by Rev. Lacour, Dr. Kagawa, and Dr. E. Stanley Jones as a part of the Movement. Further, a complete and authoritative history of Christian activities in Japan is being written with the cooperation of ten outstanding historians in this country.

Dr. Emil Brunner, reminded the delegates that Christ has been in Japan since the 16th century when Xavier brought the Gospel here. Christ speaks to many men beyond the walls of the church through Christian institutions and through followers of His who belong to no Christian institutions as such. Christ is at work in all of life and we must look there to find Him.

Dr. Toyohiko Kagawa helped the group to frankly face some of the difficulties involved in evangelism in Japan today. Among them are the international problems such as anti-American feeling in Japan and the influences of Communism; as well as problems within Japan such as the present economic depression, reviving Buddhism, Shintoism, and nationalism. The lack of unity within the church itself is a great problem in presenting the message of the one God.

During this year the Centenary Movement plans to carry forward its united evangelistic activities putting especial emphasis on five activities:

1. General evangelistic campaigns. Dr. Jones will carry on his nationwide preaching mission in which he is presently engaged. Dr. Kagawa will try to recruit leading pastors and laymen to form active evangelistic teams throughout the country.
2. Visitation Evangelism. National and local conferences followed by institutes to study methods of visitation evangelism are projected. This method of evangelism is seen by some as a really promising hope for the needs of Japan.
3. Lacour's special evangelistic teams will come again this summer to follow up the work done in Fukushima ken last summer and to extend the field with ten more centers in the Kansai district.
4. Educational evangelism through the media of musical and audio visual means will be carried on by Drs. Morris and Levett who will return to this country from Australia for their second visit this May. Dr. Sherwood Eddy will come in November to lecture among youth groups.
5. Mass meetings to declare the purpose and challenge of the Centenary Movement will be held in five places during this year to arouse public interest in the Movement.

On the 23rd, the delegates voted to negotiate to become an "Associate Member" of the World Council of Churches. After negotiating with the Kyodan and the Seikokai, the NCC will try to form a united study commission on the theme of Faith and Order. This would make possible a combination of the several separate studies that are now being carried on.

The budget approved for this year allots for Administration ¥3,461,000, Public Relations ¥500,000, Home and Family Life ¥600,000, AVACO ¥10,116,000, Christian Literature Commission ¥15,130,000, and Church School ¥3,702,000. (compare this with figures given in JCAN #36 April 1, 1954 p.1). About 70% of the donated funds is raised in the United States of America. However, if the money gained from the sale of literature and the money returned into the Revolving Fund of the Christians Literature Commission be included (as it is above), then only 50% of the total budget can be said to come directly from the USA. The total budget for this year is 33.5 million as compared to 27 and 29 million for the two years preceeding. (About 3 million of this increase may be accounted for by the inclusion of the money from the sale of literature in the total budget for the first time.)

It is interesting to note the comparison of this year's statistics with those for last of those groups cooperating with the NCC.

	This year	Last year
Churches	1,510	1,548
Preaching Stations	453	457
Japanese pastors	2,314	2,273
Missionaries	665	549
Membership	206,931	198,571
Baptisms	12,729	14,395

It may be pointed out that part of the decrease in the number of churches and preaching stations is due to the withdrawal of the Nazarene church from the NCC.

The NCC also passed three timely resolutions at these meetings. First, in censure of government officials who pay homage at religious shrines and are considering rebuilding national shrines, the N.C.C. resolved that Religious freedom must be preserved as stated in the Constitution. Religious freedom is a basic human right as well as an integral force for democracy, it was stated. As recorded in Article 12 of the Constitution of Japan, "It is unlawful to compel anyone to attend or participate in religious festivals or any religious activities." The law also states "that neither Government nor any government organization can legislate against religious worship or religious education."

The second resolution concerned the promotion of the Home and New Life movement in Japan. It was stated at the Meeting that "we as Christians must assume a large share of the responsibility of rehabilitating moral life in Japan. We have a great opportunity to strengthen the moral fiber of Japan acting on the prerogatives of the Christian Gospel. We must love one another through sacrificial and devotional life. We must create the spirit of social welfare, and thus enrich the noble character of the Japanese people."

This keynoted the sense of urgency and realization of unlimited opportunity in this country where only one percent of the Christians are farmers. For five days this interdenominational and international group of missionaries heard lectures and discussed how they could more effectively communicate the Good News. Some of the specialists who lectured were: Dr. Gordon Bowles of Tokyo Univ. who gave an anthropological introduction to the Japanese culture; Dr. Lindstrom who gave the results of research in several rural communities by research fellows of ICU; and various government officials who explained various services of the government to rural people and ways that the missionaries could cooperate with these services.

Although many practical projects were discussed (from decontaminating "night soil to enriching the diets of puny pullets) most of the missionaries were impressed by the high degree of technical proficiency of government workers and felt that the way they could best serve was in relating people in need to the proper sources of help as well as backing this help up with a spiritual context. For instance Dr. David Takahara, speaking of the Japan "4 H Club" pointed out the weakness in the area of "Heart" is almost inevitable because religion as such can not be taught in the Japanese schools. He suggested that the way this could be corrected was through Christian leaders taking an active part in local clubs witnessing through their lives and informal contacts with the members.

A similar Course is projected for next year. Plans will be made in closer conjunction with the NCC and the rural commissions of interested denominations.

